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ABSTRACT

This report examines the results of a survey conducted to trace the activities of the graduates of SEED--a "free" high school that is an alternative to the regular high school program in Toronto. The survey was conducted to see how many former SEED students had gone on to universities or community colleges, had had problems meeting the entrance requirements, are continuing with their studies, and how many have dropped out. The survey, which includes students from the school's first two years, also contains the students' evaluation of SEED as a developing community and of their own experiences there. In addition, the report describes the SEED program, presents the survey methodology and instrument, and draws conclusions from the study. (Author/DN)

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AFTER SEED

Greg Cable

#118

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Preface

In any discussion of the merits or defects of "free-schools," a question that is often asked, usually by parents, is -- "But will the kids be able to get into university?" Perhaps with the loosening of university entrance requirements and the broadening of the high school curriculum, the question is not now so difficult to answer as it was even a few years ago, yet it is still frequently asked.

Since the formation of SEED as a "free" high school within the system, there has been concern voiced by parents, trustees and administrators (if not students) about whether this public alternative provided sufficient accredited courses within a suitably structured environment that the students could progress to and successfully tackle post-secondary work.

The present co-ordinator of SEED asked the Research Department to trace students from the school's first two years to see how many went on to universities or community colleges, how many had problems meeting the entrance requirements, how many are continuing with their studies, and how many have dropped out.

The original idea was to produce a purely statistical report, but such analysis means little to the students and is not easily applied to a school such as SEED. It was decided, therefore, to expand the report to include the students' evaluation of SEED as a developing community and of their own experiences there.

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A VERY BRIEF HISTORY OF SEED[1]

SEED began in the Summer of 1968 as a Summer of Experience, Exploration, and Discovery for high school students without jobs. It was launched as a co-operative endeavour by educational and social agencies. Six hundred students met informally with resource people, called catalysts, in homes, parks, school buildings and public sites. The programme was such a success that it was repeated the following Summer as well as during the 1969-70 year. By this time it was very much a "student affair," given life, form, and direction (such as it was) by its participants.

In the Winter of that year, the SEED community drew up a brief for presentation to the Board asking that SEED be established within the system as an alternative to the regular high school programme, and in June, 1970, the Board formally established SEED as an experimental secondary school.

In the pre-Board days, students were responsible for course organization. If a student had a particular interest, a search was made for others with a similar interest, a catalyst found, and the course organized. A consequence of Board authority over SEED, however, was the incorporation of a system of credit courses taught by four certificated teachers transferred from regular schools. The establishment of these

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1 Detailed accounts of SEED's germination can be found in: D. Yip, SEED: A Preliminary Report (Research Dept., Toronto Board of Education, 1971, No. 93); D. Yip and E. N. Wright, SEED: The First Year (Research Dept., Toronto Board of Education, 1972, No. 105); and B. and M. Shukyn, You Can't Take a Bathtub on the Subway (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973). The latter is an anecdotal and documentary account by the first co-ordinator of SEED.

courses was a source of conflict among the students, many of whom felt that the credit system undermined the basic principle of the experiment by intruding an external motivating force into what was supposed to be a personal search for knowledge. The students who had not been involved with the Summer programmes were not as concerned with the theoretical implications of the credit structure as those who had been involved in the planning of SEED, and the newcomers were also more likely to attend the credit courses.

While it was possible to receive enough credits for a Grade 13 diploma, it was also possible to go through SEED without receiving any credits at all. And, despite what some saw as an unseemly scramble for marks as university application time came around, many students relied on letters of recommendation from catalysts rather than regular credits for meeting admission standards.

THE STUDY

Method

The simplest procedure for gaining the information was through brief telephone interviews with former students. Names, addresses, and telephone numbers were obtained from lists supplied by the SEED co-ordinator and the Area Superintendent's office. Being one to two years old, many of these were inaccurate but most of the students were eventually traced with the aid of various directories and the assistance of some of the other students.

Students on the list were grouped according to the presumed grade level at which they entered SEED and priorities were assigned to each grouping for contact purposes. First priority was given to grade thirteen students in SEED I, the first year the school operated as a system alternative; second to grade thirteen students in SEED II, the second year of SEED; and third to grade twelve students at SEED I who did not appear on the grade thirteen list the following year.

The interview schedule was divided into two parts: part one asked for objective data which could, if necessary, be supplied by parents or siblings; part two asked for the students' own reactions to their experiences at SEED and for any recommendations for changes which they would make on the basis of those experiences. Being open-ended, the interviews lasted anywhere from 5 to 75 minutes.

Responses

For the 71 students whose names were on the list, 48 interviews were completed. No upper limit was applied to the number of attempts made

to contact the students and many interviews required more than five calls to be completed. Only in the SEED I - 12 group was a large percentage of the students untraceable, without so much as a phone number to guide the interviewer. In the other two groups, the lack of a larger response was due to "no answers" despite ten or more calls at various times of the day or evening and on weekends. Table 1 gives the breakdown of completed interviews and the source of the information -- student (S), parents (P), or other (O). The last column gives the number of students for whom no interview was completed but whose whereabouts and activities were learned through school documents or from other students. Only one student refused to answer the questions, the reason being that she had already taken part in "too many follow-up studies" (?).

TABLE 1

INTERVIEW COMPLETIONS

Year	Total N	Completed Interviews	Source			Accounted for
			S	P	O	
SEED I - 12	10	5 (50%)	2	2	1	1
SEED I - 13	26	20 (77%)	16	1	3	3
SEED II - 13	35	23 (66%)	15	5	3	2
TOTAL	71	48 (67%)	33	8	7	6

Credits and Diplomas

On the question relating to the number of credit and catalyst courses taken in the final year, the responses indicated that the students were not overly concerned with the credit structure. Most of the students responded with estimates of "three or four," "somewhere around five"

or similar approximations which make the data unreliable. Another element of confusion was also present because some students took catalyst courses which were subsequently accredited. Because the primary focus of the study was the post-SEED educational experience of the students, their responses to this question were not balanced by a check of the official records, but were allowed to stand. It may well be that this information, indicating a lack of concern with credits, is more significant than totally reliable data would be.

Also unreliable are the data on the question of diplomas. Although the number of credit courses taken in some instances would suggest that a diploma would not be awarded, a number of students had earned grade thirteen credits in grade twelve at their regular school before entering SEED. Some, who were certain that they had enough credits for a diploma and that they had been credited with one, never received the piece of paper so stating. One student, for example, said "I think I was supposed to get a diploma, but it probably got fouled up in the bureaucracy, everything always did. So, no, technically I didn't get a diploma. But I got an Ontario Scholarship."

Table 2 gives the responses to the "credit and diploma" questions. Although the two columns seem to correspond quite well, each contains a small number of students who appear in one column but not the other.

TABLE 2

NUMBER OF STUDENTS RECEIVING CREDITS AND DIPLOMAS

Year	Total N	4+ Credits		Diploma	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
I - 12	5	1	4	1	4
I - 13	20	11	9	10	10
II - 13	23	13	10	13	10

Further Education

"Further education attempted" was defined for the purposes of this study as "final application to a post-secondary institution." This precluded the inclusion of two students, one in each of I - 13 and II - 13, who submitted early applications to universities but did not send in their final marks due to lack of interest.

Table 3 gives the post-secondary school history of the former CEED students.

TABLE 3

POST-SECONDARY SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

Year	Total N	Further Education Attempted	
		N	(%)
I - 12	5	1	(20)
I - 13	20	18	(90)
II - 13	23	21	(91)
TOTAL	48	40	(83)

The figures above include a number of students who were accepted by universities but who decided not to register. Three students in each of the I - 13 and II - 13 groups made this decision.

In the I - 13 group, one student, accepted by the University of Toronto and York, became involved with setting up free schools in another part of the province; another, accepted at the same two universities, decided to pursue nursing at a Toronto hospital; the third, accepted at the University of Toronto, has been working with a community-based media organization.

In the II - 13 group, one student, accepted at Yale, had a change of mind and decided to explore further an interest in theatre; another had an acceptance from Brock held over while travelling in the Pacific; the third took a year for work and is reapplying to the University of Toronto for 1973-74.

All students who made final application to universities were accepted by at least one institution to which they applied. Table 4 lists the institutions to which applications were made and the number of acceptances and rejections. The totals are greater than those for "further education attempted" (Table 3) since some students were accepted at up to three different universities.

No further information was supplied by the student, as to the reason for the rejection from University of Toronto. Of the other two, one student found the York rejection strange since she had a full complement of credits and a diploma, and the other, while originally accepted by Toronto and Trent and rejected by York, eventually enrolled at York after professor-catalysts wrote letters on his behalf.

With the exception of the rejections, the only problem with the admissions procedures reported by any student involved getting a transcript of marks from the Board. Quite a number of students received early acceptance from the universities mainly on the basis of recommendations by catalysts, many of whom were professors.

It is interesting to note how much further afield the II - 13 group went for post-secondary education. In the I - 13 group, although three students were accepted at Trent, all the graduates interviewed attended either Toronto or York.

TABLE 4

SUCCESS OF APPLICATIONS TO POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

Institution	Accepted			Rejected		
	I - 12 N=1	I - 13 N=18	II - 13 N=21	I - 12	I - 13	II - 13
Brock			1			
Carleton			1			
Queens			2			
Ryerson			1			
Sheridan	1					
Sussex (Eng.)			1			
Toronto		17	13		1	
Trent		3				
Waterloo			1			
Yale			1			
York		7	7		2	
Lycee Francais de Londres (Eng.)			1			
Architectural School in England (unspecified)			1			
TOTAL	1	27	30		3	

Apart from the six students who, though accepted, chose not to attend university, a number of other students stated at the time of the interview that they were not planning to complete post-secondary schooling.

Only one student in the II - 13 group left after the first year at university, finding York uncongenial and with plans for travelling and, perhaps, attending school in Paris. Six students in the I - 13 group, however, left after a short time. One found the institution expensive and the students "apathetic" and "mindless" and became involved with an urban commune in the United States; a second found the university atmosphere too rigidly similar to that of the high school she had attended before SEED and got a job; a third, doing little work in second year, took a "personally and socially useful" job with a mental health organization; a fourth enjoyed the first year of architecture but, given the way he felt the profession was going, could not see "taking the role of architect for life" and subsequently found a job; a fifth simply did not like university and is now working in England; and the sixth continued part time while working with OXFAM and in educational politics.

Table 5 gives the present status of all interviewed students and the percentage of students who are continuing post-secondary education referring to it as the greatest experience of their lives and another remarking on the novelty of actually loving school for the first time.

As to why SEED was so valuable, six students mentioned that they learned the skill of learning, how to find and use available resources: six students also mentioned the acquisition of self-discipline; and another six remarked on the value of so many interesting people congregated in one place. Other comments were that SEED had opened up entirely new fields of enquiry and that students learned responsibility, became socially and environmentally aware, re-established personal drive and developed an idea of their own potential.

TABLE 5

PRESENT STATUS OF FORMER SEED STUDENTS

Year	Total N	Present Status: Continuing Post-Secondary	Working	Travelling	Other*
I - 12	5		1	1	3
I - 13	20	9 (50%)**	5	1	5
II - 13	23	17 (81%)**	3	2	1

* The "other" category includes some form of schooling (regular secondary, music, ballet), housewife, etc.

** The percentage is of those accepted by post-secondary institutions.

It was clear from the responses that the most valuable learning experience was having to organize the school's brief to the Board, and make SEED a public alternative. This highly political process of trying to reach a consensus on school problems and goals while dealing with a large bureaucracy in an atmosphere tingling with manoeuvering produced a sense of exhilaration in many of the students. Interestingly, of the four students out of the entire group who were not enthralled by the experience, two gave as their reason that they were not involved in the politics of the school.

After the goal of establishment was realized, there was evidently some let-down. As well, the nature of the school seemed to change. Three students commented that SEED was a tremendous experience in the first two Summers and one Winter (i.e., before it came under the Board's jurisdiction), but went downhill after that.

On the negative side, apart from the politically electric atmosphere which bored the students mentioned above, two students commented that they could not fully realize their potential at SEED since they were not "arts" oriented, and they found the science facilities inadequate, to say the least.

A sharper criticism came from two students who felt that there were too many "games" being played by the students, particularly social status or money games where, for example, the student with the most celebrated parent received the most respect. A few other students also mentioned the unfortunate existence of cliques which detracted from what could have been a more fruitful informality.

On the whole, though, the SEED experience was a liberating one for the great majority of the students. It was also, as many students observed, a lot of fun. Two students said that entering university was in many respects equivalent to returning to a regular high school -- a definite step down from the SEED environment.

Recommendations

All students were asked if they would make any recommendations for changes in SEED based on their experiences in the first two years. The detail of the replies and the intensity with which some students responded indicated a close identification with and an emotional commitment to the SEED ideal. This commitment was total for two students who said that SEED is its students, nothing more, and that it was not their place to make recommendations based on experiences two years ago -- only new students to SEED had the right and responsibility to initiate changes.

Before looking at the recommendations in detail, two points should be noted. First, many of the suggested changes were based not only on personal experience but on perceptions as to how SEED has developed since the original group of students left. Many of those interviewed mentioned that they had made periodic visits to SEED and most had biting comments to make on its present state. Some examples:

- "complacent";
- "overly secure";
- "too institutionalized";
- "no one is doing anything now" (five students);
- "unrecognizable";
- "just a liberal high school";
- "a tea-party";
- "the energy is gone";
- "it's dead".

Further to this, a second point to be noted is that the original group of SEED students was often accused of (and occasionally admitted to) holding the belief that they were an elite group engaged in a true and novel experiment, and were different from the students of regular high schools.[3] Where some saw only arrogant ego-centrism in this belief, others saw a pioneer spirit which gave the first year its unpredictability, its excitement and its satisfaction. It should be added that this was not only the students' image of themselves, but also that of outside observers and parents who frequently remarked on the high level of maturity and intelligence evident in that group. One parent contacted during the interviews said that the SEED type of school can only succeed if students of such ability and character are enrolled.

This feeling was reflected in negative comments about the lottery system of enrolment. (In the first year, the students proposed a strict screening process so as to ensure that only those students who were compatible with the SEED programme could enrol. At the time, this proposal was greeted with charges of elitism and "loading the dice" so as to ensure success.[3]) Most of the negative comments about the lottery came from the I - 13 students, two of whom reiterated the need for a strict screening process. Two others recommended replacing the system, but offered no alternatives; and three students stated that the system was "terrible" and generally destructive to the school, but that they had long since resigned themselves

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2 See Yip and Wright, Op.cit. page 22.

3 See Shukyn, Op.cit. pp. 50-54.

to its inevitability. A parent, too, suggested that the lottery procedure had "killed" the school.

The lottery was endorsed, after a fashion, by one student who stated that SEED was a "closed" structure with "elitism" and "snobbery" built in and that a new school, with an expanded lottery, should be formed. This student maintained that students from working class or ethnic backgrounds, even if they attended a high school only a few blocks away from SEED, had only a one-in-a-thousand chance of even hearing about the alternative, let alone taking advantage of it. According to this student, if the Board "wanted a Parkway-type programme they should have done it" rather than applying Parkway trappings to a middle-class enclave.

Further to admission procedures, one student suggested that only senior students be admitted on the grounds that younger students were "too receptive to conventional ideas" and less likely to know their own interests or ferret out information individually. Another student, however, recommended that more intermediate students be admitted because the full potential of the SEED environment could not be realized in one or two years. Yet another stated that no student should stay longer than two years. The "senior students only" proposal was discussed during the first year with the consensus being that younger students contributed much to the educational and personal development of older students,[4] and that despite administrative problems, SEED required the presence of younger students to be a true alternative.

Some very radical recommendations reflected the view, mentioned earlier, that the most valuable learning experience of the first year was

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4 See Yip and Wright, Op.cit. pp. 12-14.

the political process of establishing SEED within the Board, and that without periods of re-creation the school had a very short life-cycle. One student suggested that SEED be destroyed every year, leaving it up to anyone interested to re-create it; another recommended that it be destroyed every three years; and yet another that it should be destroyed, period.

Nine students, eight from the I - 13 group, commented that the Board taking over the school was a mistake (despite the fact that many of these same students worked strenuously to that end). Not all of these students recommended that the Board now "get out of it," but all seemed wistful about the freedom from administrative hassles in the pre-affiliation period.

Four students recommended that the credit system be abolished while three others suggested that the system be broadened somehow, perhaps with easier accreditation of catalyst courses. One student said that he found it ridiculous that he could take a course from a university professor but receive no credit towards university admission for it because the professor didn't have a secondary school teacher's certificate. Other comments along the same line were that the procedure for awarding marks should be defined and that diplomas should not have any place in the SEED programme.

Table 6 summarizes the recommendations.

TABLE 6

A SUMMARY OF STUDENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Categories	Recommendations
General	- destroy it - destroy it every year - destroy it every three years - form a separate science division - more publicity in downtown area
Structure	- get out from under the Board - abolish credit structure - rationalize credit structure - get rid of diplomas - define marks procedures - improve direct communication between the students and the Board
Policy - Admissions	- scrap the lottery system - replace lottery with interviewing - restrict enrolment to higher grades - restrict attendance to two years - let students stay longer than two years - provide some sort of orientation for new students
Staff	- define role of co-ordinator - different teacher selection procedure - involve whole community in teacher selection - let new teachers know what's expected of them
Facilities and Supplies	- SEED should decide distribution of funds - should be tighter control on supplies (e.g., film) - better facilities (general) - better science facilities and equipment - soundproof walls and lay carpets - rent a house

CONCLUSION

The results of this study suggest that parental and administrative anxiety concerning credits and entrance to university is not completely warranted. Although not usually enunciated, universities seem to have admission policies which are flexible enough to consider factors other than performance in normal accredited courses as proof of academic competence. A formal statement to this effect was made as early as 1971 by the Director of Admissions for the University of Toronto who stated that "for a number of years, as far as the University of Toronto is concerned, there has been no correlation between requirements for the diploma and requirements for admission to university".[5]

From the recommendations and comments made by the students, it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions other than that alternative forms of secondary education are necessary to challenge restless and articulate students such as those who attended SEED. Certainly there are themes to the comments, but the most obvious one is that the nature or spirit of SEED, and hence its definition, is elusive, changing with the perspective of individual students. To repeat the statement of one of those interviewed, "SEED is its students." It is obvious, then, that any conclusions which are to be drawn from the comments should not be drawn by administrators or by reports such as this. That must be left to the present SEED community.

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5 See Shukyn, Op.cit. page 175.

APPENDIX

Outline for Open-Ended Interview of Former SEED Students

The interview schedule is divided into two parts; the first asking for factual information, the second for the students' opinions. Hopefully, parents could supply most of the information for Part I should the interviewer be unable to contact the student.

The interviewer should explain, by way of an introduction, that he/she is calling for the Toronto Board's Research Department which is gathering information concerning SEED students' experiences after leaving the school, and that this information has been requested by the present coordinator of the school, Bob Beardsley. If speaking to the student personally, it may be useful to add that although much of the information may seem irrelevant to those connected with SEED, many officials at the Board, on whom SEED's survival depends, find this sort of information useful.

PART I

1 - At what grade level were you when you entered SEED?

2 - For how long did you attend the school?

3 - How many catalyst and core-credit courses did you study?

4 - Did you receive a Grade 13 certificate or diploma?

5 - Did you apply for admission to a post secondary institution (university or community college)?

   (a) Which one(s)?

   (b) Were there any problems in gaining admission due to the number of credits or the types of courses studied?

   (c) Have you completed, or are you completing the course of study for which you applied?

   (d) If not, why not?

6 - What did you do after leaving SEED?

7 - What are you doing now?

PART II

1 - Was your experience at SEED valuable, personally and/or educationally?

2 - Based on your experiences after leaving SEED, would you recommend any changes in the structure or the programme offered at SEED?

Interview Record

Name: _____

Source: Student ☐ Parent ☐ Other ☐

Part I

1. Grade Level: 9 ☐ 10 ☐ 11 ☐ 12 ☐ 13 ☐
2. Length of Attendence: 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ years
3. For the Final Year: Catalyst _____ Credit _____
4. Grade XIII Diploma: Yes ☐ No ☐

   Number of Credits Received: _____
5. Further Education Attempted: Yes ☐ No ☐

   (a) Where: _____

   (b) Problems: _____

   (c) Completion of Studies: Yes ☐ No ☐

   (d) Reason if No: _____
6. Post SEED: _____

7. Present: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Part II

1. SEED Experience Valuable: Yes ☐ No ☐

_____

_____

_____

_____

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_____

2. Recommendations for Changes: _____

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